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ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATING IN THE HIGH
SCHOOLS.

Not long ago, I was one of those troublesome youngsters in a Boston high school who were not at all satisfied with the abundance of good things provided for the feast. Unreasonable little Oliver Twists we were; for tho a ponderous school committee of twenty-five declared our food to be sufficient, we still cried for more! We got it; we stole it when the beadle wasn't looking. I make my confession now at the safe distance of ten years. We formed a debating society. From the school we had neither the instruction we needed nor the sympathy we craved; but we stumbled along. Boys who had never labored before fell to and worked so hard on the debates that mothers became alarmed and fathers became jubilant. At last the school had somehow incited a live interest in real study!

Eight or ten of those boys I have met in recent years, and all of them declare, as they now look back on the old debating club, that they value its training above all else in their high school life. They have suggested to me the subject of this long-promised letter to our long-suffering secretary.

A small boy is said to have defined "elocution" as something they kill folks with in the United States. The laugh which this definition sent through the country is certainly due in part to the fantastic tricks which have been performed in the name of elocution. By elocution I mean what was known in the days of our fathers as "speaking pieces,"—the memorizing and reciting of words of other people. The subject has long been struggling for recognition in school and college, but has gained little more than toleration. Since the very name has fallen into ill repute—connoting as it does so much that is empty, affected, and altogether ridiculous—many schools and colleges have changed the name to "public speaking." The pity is that they have not more generally changed the thing itself.

What ordinarily goes on in high schools and academies under the name of elocution appears to me of little worth. The slight educational value that it can be coaxed into yielding under intelligent direction can be secured more efficiently and economically by other means. At least such is my belief—a belief which an examination of schools during the past few years has served to strengthen. To be sure, elocution can do something for the voice, though not so much, I am convinced, as an equal time frankly spent in the study of vocal music. Elocution can make some approach to clearness of enunciation and correctness of pronounciation, though it can do little—as nearly every class-room bears witness—without the co-operation of all other departments of study. To expect that an hour a week of elocution—or shall we say ten minutes a month for each pupil—will achieve permanent results in clearness and correctness of speech is to shut our ears to the evidence. Elocution may furnish memory training and familiarity with the best literature. But memory is of no use in itself, and should never be cultivated for itself; it may be developed incidentally by many well-taught subjects. And as for familiarity with the best literature, that is most readily attained through the study of literature for its own sake. Furthermore, elocution courses are often nothing but special preparations for prize declamations, in which contests the speakers as a rule forego the delights of “mere literature” for the sake of catching the public and the prize. Declamation, except so far as it does what can better be done in other ways, reaches nearer to the vanishing point of utter worthlessness than any other traditional high school subject to which we still cling. And we may as well stop blaming the boys for thinking so!

I can see no place in any high school or academy, however large it may be, for a special teacher of elocution. Indeed, such a teacher's failure is likely to be in direct proportion to the extent of his professional training in schools of oratory. To maintain special teachers of elocution is to place the emphasis precisely where it does not belong. All training in spoken discourse—however its name may shift with the winds and tides of popular disapproval—should be subordinate to training in thinking. It should be a means to the end of clear and direct expression of the pupil's own thoughts. Training in public speaking should be conducted by teachers who aim *first*, to produce sound thinkers, *second*, to train these thinkers

matters which confuse the ordinary discussion of the subject, to separate what may be admitted or granted from what is held by *both* sides, and thus, through this conflict of contentions, to reach the main issues. In the attempt to group their evidence in relation to these issues, they learn something of structure, coherence, unity, proportion. Best of all, they come to respect the opinions of those who differ from them, but to accept nothing and to offer nothing unless the reasoning is sound and the evidence sufficient. There could be no better training for citizenship.

There is another important aspect of this question. With wise incentive and guidance from school authorities, debating societies may go far toward precluding or counteracting certain social tendencies which have harassed the high school life of the last decade. Only three of the 185 Principals reporting to the National Education Association were in favor of secret societies in public high schools. The 390 teachers in Chicago High Schools, without a dissenting voice, characterized the influence of the fraternities as harmful to scholarship and to discipline, as un-American and undemocratic. Yet it is clear that the Clubs which we seek to abolish came in response to natural desires; and the results which we deplore are due to the methods adopted by unguided boys and girls to satisfy desires not altogether deplorable. If we have some little knowledge either of human nature or of the recent history of secret societies, we can see that the wise plan of attack is not by storm, tho the courts would unquestionably sustain us. The strategic plan is gradually to supplant the harmful clubs by others which will serve all their better purposes. Among the possible substitutes none seems better adapted to the interests of boys and of public schools than the debating club. In the larger schools of Maine these clubs are taking the place of the Greek letter societies, and a High School Debating League is now in its second year of highly successful work under the stimulus and guidance of the Bowdoin College Debating Council. The interest is shown by the fact that seven more schools have applied for admission to the league and many others have sought advice. The debating club, guided within school hours by adequate instruction in argumentation and debating, and outside school hours by the sympathetic direction of teachers, may often prevent or cure the diseases of the secret society.

learned to think! Argumentation, as it should be taught, cultivates that power,— so much demanded and so little found both in school and in the life beyond commencement,—the power of independent thinking.

Let us not be surprised if the study of the principles of argumentation—or even Burke's much mis-taught Speech—seems dry without the prospect of actual debate. We should hardly expect a half-back to feel much enthusiasm over reading the rules of the game and tackling a dummy if he could not look forward to tackling a man.

When the boy has something of his own to say, there is a chance for profitable instruction in public speaking. This may be by way of informal discussion or formal debate. The first subjects of discussion should be within the range of the boy's information and experience, as, for example, *Should this school support a basket ball team?* It is a mistake to plunge high school students at once into the intricate problems of Federal regulation of trusts and railroad rates. Let them begin with questions they are discussing among themselves, not "for the sake of argument," but for the sake of interest.

When elocution has failed to stimulate interest, formal debate may succeed, for it is a kind of game. In the time limit, the order of speakers, the alternation of sides, the actual struggle of opposing forces, the give and take of rebuttal, the fixed rules and the ethics of conduct, the qualifications for success, and the final awarding of victory, debate has much in common with tennis and football. The great superiority of debating, as the schools should look upon it, lies in the fact that it adds to many of the elements of the present absorbing interest in athletics those educational values which contribute directly to the highest type of citizenship.

From work in debating, guided by efficient instruction and right ideals, students discover that debatable questions are far from simple; and they learn to refrain from making judgments based on ignorance. The necessity for thoro preparation is forced upon them by the conditions of the contest. Often the hard work for a given debate provides their first standard for sounding the shallowness of their knowledge on other subjects. They learn to examine a question critically to find out what it actually involves, to define terms with precision, to distinguish the relevant matters from the irrelevant

in the clear, correct, straightforward and effective oral expression of their own thoughts. And I am convinced that these aims may be best achieved by the study of Argumentation and Debate.

Those who believe that argumentation deserves a higher place among secondary school studies "hold very strongly" with Cardinal Newman, "that the first step in intellectual training is to impress upon a boy's mind the idea of science, method, order, principle, and system; of rule and exception. . . . Let him once gain this habit of method, of starting from fixed points, of making his ground good as he goes, of distinguishing what he knows from what he does not know, and I conceive he will be gradually initiated into the largest and truest philosophical views, and will feel nothing but impatience and disgust at the random theories and imposing sophistries and dashing paradoxes, which carry away half formed and superficial intellects."

Science and principle,—in argumentation the student meets principles based upon the science of logic from which, as he soon discovers, the rational mind cannot escape. *Method, order, system*,—this is the very backbone of argument. Without methodical procedure from definitions to historical facts, to admitted matters, through conflicting contentions to the main issues and thence to the argument, by order of proposition and proof, the known to the unknown, all according to a systematic brief,—without all this there is chaos, not argument. No other form of discourse so readily conveys to young minds the most important ideas of rhetorical structure.

Again, *let the boy start from fixed points and make his ground good as he goes*,—this is the process of the exact sciences; but argumentation applies this process to all practical questions, especially to the innumerable public problems to the solution of which the boy should some day, as an educated citizen, bring a well-trained mind. *Let him distinguish what he knows from what he does not know*,—this is the initial business of argumentation, through which many a boy gets his first contempt for snap judgments and his first notion of testing the supposed knowledge and *random theories* by which he has been accustomed to guide his conduct in every day affairs. Graduates of secondary schools now go forth to college with cultivated memories, heads packed with ideas soon to be forgotten, often with keen desire for information. But rare are those who have

REFERENCES.

The best book on Argumentation and Debating is the *Principles of Argumentation* (Ginn and Company, Revised Edition, 1905) by Professor G. P. Baker and Professor H. B. Huntington. Professor Baker of Harvard University was the first man to develop systematic courses of instruction in these subjects. The book is beyond the grasp of high school students, but is useful for teachers.

The next best book is *The Art of Debate* (Henry Holt and Company, 1900) by Professor R. M. Alden. This book makes a stronger appeal to the interests of students, but in other respects is less adapted to purposes of instruction.

Another serviceable book for teachers is *The Process of Argument*. (A. and C. Black, 1893) by Henry Sidgwick.

Two good briefs prepared by students, together with the arguments written from these briefs, will be found in *Specimens of Prose Composition*, pages 161 to 231 (Ginn and Company, 1907) by C. R. Nutter, F. W. C. Hersey, and C. N. Greenough.

Poor briefs will be found in the various books which provide ready-made outlines and arguments on many subjects, without stimulating students to think for themselves. Such books should be shunned.

Among the text-books in Composition and Rhetoric which devote sections to Argumentation, the book by Professor Hammond Lamont, Managing Editor of the New York Evening Post, is especially worth mentioning. (*English Composition*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906, Chapter V.)

Concerning the aim, scope, and value of courses in Argumentation and Debating for secondary schools, there are two good addresses in the Journal of the Proceedings of the National Educational Association for 1903. One is by Professor G. P. Baker; the other is by Mr. C. S. Hartwell, of the Boys' High School, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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[These monthly leaflets are issued free only to members of the N. E. Association of Teachers of English, which holds two meetings a year: on the third Saturday of March and of November. The payment of the annual fee of one dollar now will secure membership until March 1909. For further information address the Secretary, George H. Browne, *The Browne and Nichols School*, Cambridge, Mass.]

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WHAT THE COLLEGE HAS A RIGHT TO EXPECT OF THE SCHOOLS IN ENGLISH¹

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I should like to begin by drawing your attention to the form in which the subject of my remarks is stated: "What the College Has a Right to Expect of the Schools in English;" not, I am thankful to say, What the college expects of the schools. This I should never attempt to answer; first, because I have no authority from any college to interpret its mind on this point; second, because I doubt whether the colleges in general have any clearly realized expectation on the subject. But what the college has a right to expect we may all speculate about, and you and I may as freely utter ourselves on the question as any official or committee or faculty.

It seems easiest to begin with two things which the college has no right to expect. First, it has no right to expect to dictate to the school its whole curriculum in English. I do not say that it has ever claimed a right to do this; but it would not be difficult to point to entrance requirements which imply something very like it. But the claim is obviously unfair, for our secondary schools are not mainly or primarily fitting schools. It is but a small minority of their students who go to college, and it would be unwise to determine the English curriculum

¹ Notes of an address given before The New England Association of Teachers of English, November 16, 1907.

by the needs of the minority, unless it could be shown that preparation for college is also the best preparation for the student who goes to work at once. Second, it has no right to dictate the method of teaching. It may, of course, advise, and expect its advice to be heard with respect. But only a small proportion of college teachers have had experience in schools, and they are as a whole not wise enough or experienced enough to be able to claim authority over the methods to be used in another branch of the profession.

Speaking in general on the positive side of our topic, one might say that what the colleges have a right to expect of the schools is that they should bring the pupils to a certain level of culture. Our task now is to define as precisely as may be what this level of culture is. From the college point of view it implies the preparation of the student's mind in such a way as to render it receptive of the information and responsive to the training which the college has to give. This preparation itself involves both information and training, and on these points we must try to be specific.

The pupil should have been taught to *speak*. No part of the preparation is more important; no part is more commonly ignored or more imperfectly accomplished. Boys not only come to college but leave college, who have difficulty in constructing orally a sentence of any complexity or length, or conducting a conversation without slang and with clear articulation. This is surely a matter for the schools, if the homes have not already done it. The colleges have a right to expect that a candidate for admission should be able to speak with fair distinctness and accuracy of pronunciation, to express his own ideas in grammatical sentences, and in language free from the jargon of the streets.

The pupil should have been taught to *read*. By this is to be understood not merely the putting together of symbols and sounds, but the training of the mind to concentrate upon the sense of what is written, and to refuse to pass on until the sense has been grasped. This capacity is often gained by students late, sometimes not at all. In a class in Bacon's *Essays* in Harvard College, I have found my chief difficulty to lie in leading the

students to realize when they have not understood. The great amount of ground to be covered both in school and college is perhaps the reason for the common slovenliness in reading. If so, we should seek to reduce the quantity; but about the necessity for this training in extracting the marrow of an author there can be no question. Reading should also include reading aloud. It is common to lament this as a lost art. Certainly few of my students can read a passage of English prose with intelligibility, force, and a sympathetic modulation. Yet, both as a highly desirable accomplishment, and as a means of teaching and testing the appreciation of literature, reading aloud is of immense importance. It is, unfortunately, one of the qualifications concerning which, so far as I know, the statements of entrance requirements in all colleges are silent. It would be difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to place it among these requirements and to examine on it; but, in any case, it is surely the business of the schools.

The pupil should have been taught to *write*. If the training in speaking already discussed has been attended to, this, I think, is not so laborious a matter as it is sometimes considered. It does, of course, imply further detail. Any statement of college requirements is explicit as to the correct use of words, the construction of sentences and paragraphs, spelling, and the employment of capitals and punctuation. I do not know that anyone disputes the right of the college to demand these things, and few if any schools in New England fail to attempt to supply them.

More debatable ground is reached when we come to the question of literature. There are two parts to this question: that concerning the teaching of literature as such, and that concerning the teaching of the history of literature. On the former of these something has already been implied in what has been said of reading; and to that might be added the explanation of allusions. Here lies the teacher's main opportunity for the imparting of that general information the range of which is one measure of the culture of both teacher and pupil. Clearly no definition of amount can be given here: the important point is that the pupil should be trained to pass over nothing that he does

not understand. The matter of allusions is worth dwelling on for a moment. The pleasure to be derived from an allusion is dependent on previous acquaintance with the fact alluded to. In the absence of such acquaintance, an allusion is not an allusion, but a conundrum. Yet no one can seriously propose to pass it over unexplained. The two great sources of allusion in our literature are the Bible and the classics. Neither of these is known to our generation of students as they were known to readers contemporary with the authors of the chief masterpieces of English literature; and matters are becoming worse rather than better. Clearly then, so far from giving up the laborious explanation of these things, teachers of English have to face the task of making up for this lack of literary background by supplying generously whatever is called for to insure complete intelligibility of the texts read in school. If the labor which this involves for both student and teacher interferes *for the time* with the artistic appreciation, let us say, of Milton, the fault is in the situation, not in the method which the situation makes necessary. Gradually, by such teaching, a background will be acquired, other poems will be made easier and more enjoyable, and in the long run even the poems which have become of necessity a means of training will be returned to with pleasure.

Much the same position must be taken with regard to all the matters contained in the notes to a well-edited text. One often hears protests against "note-cramming." "Note-cramming" is a bad name for a good thing, if it means only the acquiring of the information necessary to make a piece of literature intelligible. If it describes anything else, it describes a stupid way of performing a necessary task. No method is safe with a poor teacher. Our concern is with results; and we maintain that the college has a right to expect that what the student reads in school he shall be taught to understand. As for the direct cultivation of taste and appreciation, vastly important though it is, I believe that no specific demand can be laid down. The teacher with a gift for this may be trusted not to fail to exercise it; the teacher without a gift had better leave it alone. I cannot see

that any college has a right to set up a requirement in artistic appreciation.

In the history of literature, there is no difficulty in making a requirement specific or in examining. The question is rather as to whether there is room for it in the curriculum. But this much, I think, may fairly be asked, that such an outline of literary history be taught as will provide the student with the ability to place in their period and environment the works and authors that he reads, and with some knowledge of their relative importance. Whether this is to be done by means of a regular textbook, or incidentally in connection with books read, may be left to the individual school.

It will be observed that I have given the college a right to expect a great deal that may never be directly examined upon. I think this is as it should be. No teacher whom I am addressing expects to get recognition in examination points for all he does. And our concern here is not with examinations and their remote and helpless approximations. Our programme has permitted us for this morning to concern ourselves with some of the realities of our profession.

